# Chapter 8: Sand Over It

Besides Chapter 1, none of the dating stories so far amounted to a serious, committed relationship. Some were a one-off kiss out of nowhere. Others were casual flings. They're entertaining to recap, but they didn't exactly make me feel cared for or SEEN.

I'd like to offer the readers a little hope, if you want it. Life doesn't have to be an endless game of Firsts (first date, first kiss, first argument). I wasn't sure how I'd write about this one, but I've come to find out the person in question has blocked me, so I can basically say whatever I want about her. What I want to say is that she's great.

That's the interesting part: we never had a fight or a serious disagreement. For whatever reason, it just didn't work out. It was confusing to hear, at the time, that she wanted to end things. Deep down, I could also feel something was missing. The spark wasn't there, but I was willing to try different fire-starting techniques, to use a bad metaphor.

Let's call her [M]. I had finally found someone who not only spoke English but was in fact an English teacher. It was the first time I could see a legit future with someone since ending things with my ex-wife.

I'll quickly share how we met, because it was humorous to me on a lot of levels. I met [M] on a dating app. We exchanged a few messages in Portuguese, obviously with me using Google Translate. Once I noticed we had a decent conversation going, I asked her to go off the app, basically to talk on social media or exchange WhatsApp. She responded that she'd rather keep talking on the app.

I gave it my best attempt at humor in Portuguese and said something like, "I'll make an exception for you and keep using the app." Suddenly the conversation went cold. I didn't think much of it. This happens often when online dating. You can get blocked or unmatched at any time, for any reason. It really starts to feel like white noise.

Fast forward a week or two. I open the app and whose message do I see? [M] had sent me a message saying hello, she'd just seen me walking down the street. In English. That seemed odd. Why would someone who "ghosted" me reach out in English, and also know what I look like well enough from photos to notice me on the street?

We exchanged some messages and agreed to grab some food that day since we were both free. On the date, I asked how she even knew it was me. She said she'd heard the News Stand Guy greet me by name. It was near my house, so I went there often.

Then the topic of why she originally didn't keep the conversation going came up. She said the way my message about making an exception for her came off in Portuguese seemed rude. I was honestly shocked, but I didn't linger on it. Internally, I was thinking: thank God she didn't know me as Shoulder Kiss Guy. That would have been much easier to interpret as rude, and that one happened in person. Fair enough on the translation, though. Google Translate and I have made enemies before.

This story will always stick with me because not speaking the same language wasn't the problem here. It was that we couldn't fully express ourselves with one another. We lasted about eight weeks.

This was fairly recent. I'm almost 40 at the time of writing, and I'm very much at the stage where I want a serious partner. I don't want to speak negatively about dating in Rio. I love this place with all my heart. But it does offer some very interesting hurdles. I consider Rio the Las Vegas of South America. It doesn't only bring party-loving tourists from all over Brazil. It brings them from the entire world.

Like I said, I'm not a big partier. I know most of these stories have included alcohol, but I'm actually a pretty health-conscious person. Alcohol is a depressant, so it can trigger depressive episodes. Don't get me wrong, I let my hair down every now and then. It's by no means the norm.

Here's why I think dating in Rio is difficult for me: I'm someone who loves a sunrise because I woke up for it, versus someone who's been out all night and happens to see it. There's a "what happens in Rio stays in Rio" mindset. Most expats living here don't think like this. Sure, it would be fun to live like it's a constant party. But who's gonna pay the bills?

I said early on that I'm divorced. The most obvious reason we're not together is that I cheated on her. That's the danger of all this: a seemingly innocent day out can end with you kissing someone you shouldn't. But it's a lot more nuanced than that. I'd like to take a minute to describe why that relationship ended. You already know the story of how we met.

In the beginning, things were casual. After a few weeks of seeing each other, I told her I was enjoying it but couldn't see it becoming exclusive until one of us learned the other's language. Props to her, she's basically fluent, while I'm still struggling to get out the simplest of Portuguese words.

Over time we kept getting closer, and I started to change my opinion. She was improving every day, too. After about two years, we decided to make it exclusive. That was the beginning of the end. While we'd been casual for almost two years during my Digital Nomad phase, we seemed to have amazing communication. Sure, we had our issues, but we always found our way back to each other.

Looking back, the two relationships are mirror images. With my ex-wife, I could barely speak her language and we still communicated amazingly, until we got serious. With [M], we shared a language, but I still didn't feel like we truly understood each other.

I genuinely wish her the best. The Dutch have an expression for moments like this: *zand erover* (sand over it). Luckily, I live in Rio. We have plenty of sand.